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STATE FOR EUR FARAH PANDITH AND KAREEMA DAOUD

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SUBJECT: MUSLIM OUTREACH STRATEGY - THE NEXT LEVEL

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. Italy represents an opportunity for U.S. interests in promoting the integration of moderate Muslims in a Western European democracy. The level of immigration, particularly Muslim immigration, has risen steeply in recent years, and both Italy and resident Muslims are still evolving their relationship. That evolution gives us an opportunity to facilitate a positive integration that promotes a shared sense of citizenship while maintaining and respecting different religious traditions. We share our experience also because there may be common areas of approach useful at other EUR posts. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Most of Italy's Muslims reside in the north, where most of the job opportunities exist. ConGen Milan has been evolving our outreach program to moderate Muslims, proceeding from the getting-to-know-you stage. In two years of meeting and engaging moderate Muslims in Northern Italy, ConGen Milan has moved to the next stage of promoting multi-faith/cultural integration. Meeting Muslims is not the goal in this process, but only the starting point. We are continuing to expand our understanding of the moderate Muslim communities throughout the North, and building positive relationships with these diverse communities. We are also building relations with active NGOs and local government officials, to get a well-rounded understanding of the situation in Italy for Muslims. We are taking advantage of the opportunity to serve as a bridge between Italians and Muslim immigrants and have a positive impact.

¶3. (SBU) Italy has traditionally been an exporter of people, but today Italy is a receiver of immigrants, and the country is having trouble grappling with this new role. Certain integration issues, such as schools (both approving Muslim schools and integrating immigrants into Italian schools) and the establishment of mosques and construction of minarets, have proven difficult in some communities. ConGen Milan deepened its interactions with Muslim contacts and encourage their integration into Italian society through a series of events designed to put Italians civilians and officials directly in contact with their Muslim neighbors. We provide venues for Muslims and Italians to exchange perspectives. We are also seeking to help Muslim leaders be more effective advocates for their community with local Italian officials.

¶4. (SBU) We are combining focus on our economic strategic goals to encourage activities on the part of private sector and local government that give opportunity to develop a well-integrated, economically prosperous community among immigrant Muslims. Improving economic opportunity is good for the local economy and our overall partnership with Italy, and good for the immigrants.

¶5. (SBU) Combined with increased understanding of moderate Muslim traditions, this economic integration will help ensure the immigrant communities will not become recruiting grounds for radical groups in the future. As part of this effort, Consulate officials met with many Muslims in ten cities throughout Northern Italy over the past six months. In every city, we also met with local officials and usually with active NGOs. Note: While the majority of Muslims in Italy are originally from other countries, there is a small community of Italian converts. Many of their interests overlap with goals of immigrant Muslims, in promoting acceptance of a minority religion/culture relatively new to Italy. End note.

¶6. (SBU) After making contact with Muslims, we began to facilitate contacts between them and local officials, businesspeople, and other Italians. We sent young Muslims on IV and VolVis programs to the United States in both multi-faith and Muslim groups, and provided fora to report on their American experience of integration with Italian civilians and local government officials. We also introduced Muslims to other Muslims and encouraged more intra-community communications and cooperation. We inspired some of our Muslim contacts to host their own inter-cultural events, and we have been asked to host more public get-togethers, focused on specific issues of interest, such as starting a new business. After helping these groups make connections, we found that sometimes it was still necessary for us to

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actively advocate on their behalf, usually because a government process has frustrated them and is not transparent. We have had success with this advocacy and the fact that we raise the issue of integration is significant with local officials.

¶7. (SBU) We will continue to work with our Muslim contacts to help them become the leaders that are necessary to make a difference. We will continue to facilitate cross-cultural contacts that promote shared goals and promote integration. To achieve this, we have developed six goals for our future Muslim Outreach program:

A) Provide more opportunities in a neutral environment for Muslims to explain their situations and help us and Italians understand their issues.

Example: We hosted a tea with Muslim women in an attempt to understand their problems and issues. They told us about their problems with schools and teachers and how they really feel about always being asked about the veil. We found that an all-women discussion produced a livelier discussion than had been the case in mixed groups. And we inspired the women to host their own outreach, inviting local government officials and other Italians.

B) Provide more fora for Muslims to meet regular, average Italians who may not have ever met a Muslim.

Examples: We have invited regular Italians to our Iftar dinners and to attend a concert performed by Kantara, a group of Muslim-Tunisian and American musicians. We have also involved Muslims in our regular economic-focused Partnership for Growth events.

C) Introduce Muslims to more local officials and NGOs who might help them accomplish community integration goals.

Example: Upon the return of two groups of travelers, five Voluntary Visitors and two inter-faith International Visitors, we hosted lunches and invited city officials so the travelers could discuss their findings and conclusions. We included representatives of NGOs, often affiliated with the Catholic Church, active in various forms of immigrant integration. The participants all exchanged business cards and the Muslims now have new contacts within the cities.

D) Work with Muslim communities to help establish outreach strategies, in order to break the negative news cycle in which these communities often find themselves.

Example: After consulting with us, a local Muslim women's group arranged a seminar for "those who are more used to talking to us than to listening," which was hosted by an NGO group they met through one of our previous events!

E) Introduce Muslim immigrants to bankers and financial players who might show them the way to start businesses, as economic success helps tremendously in integration, and is also one of our general goals for Italy. We will continue to engage Muslim entrepreneurs in Partnership for Growth programming.

Example: We hosted a meeting with immigrant entrepreneurs to try to understand the obstacles facing an immigrant who wants to start a business. We learned about what worked and what doesn't. Armed with this information, we are planning a lunch with bankers and Muslim leaders and businesses.

F) Advocate on behalf of Muslims with our contacts, especially government officials, as we determine appropriate issues (e.g., multi-cultural schools and mosque/minaret issues).

Examples: When the city of Milan closed an Italian-Egyptian Muslim school, the school did everything they could to re-open, but were running into a brick wall. After one meeting with the responsible official to express our interest and inquire about the "lack of transparency," the school was finally re-opened. We also met with city officials to express our interest in the case of a request for approval of a mosque that has been pending for years. The official took our inquiry very seriously and promised to get back to us

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shortly. We find out about partners in the push for integration. In the case of the request for a mosque, the local Jewish community had also advocated on behalf of their Muslim friends with city officials.

Conclusion

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18. (SBU) ConGen Milan's program has been positively received by our Muslim contacts, and appreciated by Italian officials eager to make links in the Muslim communities. Muslims have expressed deep appreciation not only for listening to them, but also for putting them in contact with officials and businesspeople, for advising them on public outreach, and for advocating for them. Italian officials, NGOs, and academics appreciate our facilitative powers to promote integration and mutual understanding. To illustrate our success, one of our young Muslim contacts was invited by Minister of Interior Amato to serve as a consultant to the government on integration issues, and in he told the MOI that ConGen Milan's approach to Muslim Outreach should serve as a "model" for the GOI. We will continue to work with the rest of the posts in Italy to engage moderate Muslims and do our part to assist the GOI in integration issues.

GRAZE